

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-08

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NEA-06 NSC-05 NSCE-00 SSO-00

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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6741

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN NY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MOSCOW 1373

LIMDIS

GENEVA FOR MEPC DEL

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, EG, UR, SY

SUBJ: SOVIET OFFICIAL ON GROMYKO'S VISIT TO ME AND ME SITUATION

REF: STATE 021514

1. SUMMARY AND COMMENT. MFA DEPUTY CHIEF, NEAR EAST COUNTRIES DIVISION PYRLIN ON JANUARY 30 DISCUSSED GROMYKO'S UPCOMING VISIT TO DAMASCUS AND CAIRO AND SEVERAL OTHER MIDDLE EAST QUESTIONS WITH POLITICAL COUNSELOR. PYRLIN SAID GROMYKO'S TALKS WITH EGYPTIAN
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LEADERS WILL CONCERN BILATERAL RELATIONS, THE MIDDLE

EAST SITUATION, AND THE GENEVA CONFERENCE. HE REFERRED SPECIFICALLY TO SADAT'S LE MONDA INTERVIEW AND SAID THE SOVIET-EGYPTIAN "PROBLEMS" IN THIS REGARD WILL BE DISCUSSED, THEREBY IMPLYING THAT UPCOMING TALKS WILL BE FRANK AND TOUGH. SUGGESTING THAT GROMYKO WILL BE BEARING ROSES AS WELL AS THORNS, HOWEVER, PYRLIN SAID THREE AGREEMENTS WILL BE SIGNED IN CAIRO: A SCIENTIFIC-TECHNICAL AGREEMENT, A CONSULAR CONVENTION, AND AN AGREEMENT ON COOPERATION IN ECONOMIC PLANNING. THE EGYPTIAN DEBT, HOWEVER, WILL NOT BE ON GROMYKO'S AGENDA BUT WILL BE DISCUSSED AT ECONOMIC TALKS IN MOSCOW NEXT MONTH. PYRLIN SAID GROMYKO WILL HOLD GENERAL TALKS WITH THE SYRIANS AND WILL SIGN A HEALTH AGREEMENT. WE FIND IT INTERESTING THAT GROMYKO WILL EVIDENTLY BE SIGNING BOTH IN DAMASCUS AND CAIRO AGREEMENTS WHICH WERE PREVIOUSLY INTENDED TO BE RATIFIED DURING BREZHNEV VISIT TO MIDDLE EAST. THIS WOULD TEND TO CONFIRM OTHER REPORTS THAT BREZHNEV VISIT TO THE AREA HAS BEEN PUT OFF INDEFINITELY.

ON PALESTINIAN MATTERS, PYRLIN ATTRIBUTED THE DELAY IN OPENING THE PLO'S MOSCOW OFFICE TO A PALESTINIAN HOLD UP IN NAMING A REPRESENTATIVE AND SOME PROBLEMS ON THE SOVIET SIDE IN FINDING A SITE FOR THE PLO'S OFFICE. SOVIETS BELIEVE THE GEORGE HABASH'S PFLP WILL ULTIMATELY REJOIN THE PLO ORGANIZATION, ACCORDING TO PYRLIN. THE SHAD'S RECENT VISIT TO ARAB CAPITALS WAS PORTRAYED AS AN IRANIAN EFFORT TO OBTAIN A GREATER MIDDLE EAST VOICE WHICH HAD PRODUCED ONLY MODEST SUCCESS. KING FAISAL BY CONTRAST, PYRLIN THOUGHT, HAD SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE AMONG THE ARABS, BUT THIS WAS UNFORTUNATELY USED AGAINST THE USSR. PYRLIN GAVE AN EXPECTED PLUG REGARDING THE EARLY RECONVENING OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE AND HOPED THIS MIGHT TAKE PLACE IN MARCH OR APRIL. HE AFFIRMED, HOWEVER, THAT THE SOVIET UNION DOES NOT BELIEVE RECONVENING GENEVA WOULD PRECLUDE NEGOTIATIONS IN OTHER FORUMS END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

3. WHEN ASKED FOR HIS OVERVIEW OF CURRENT MIDDLE EAST SITUATION, PYRLIN MENTIONED GROMYKO'S VISIT TO CAIRO
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AND HIS IMMINENT DEPARTURE FOR DAMASCUS, ONLY ANNOUNCED IN PRAVDA THIS MORNING. BY WAY OF BACKGROUND, PYRLIN SAID SOMEWHAT UNCONVINCINGLY THAT THE RATHER HASTY SCHEDULING OF THE VISIT DID NOT REFLECT ANY PARTICULAR URGENCY ON THE PART OF THE SOVIETS. RATHER, GROMYKO'S HEAVY SCHEDULE IN FEBRUARY AND UPCOMING MEETING OF ARAB FOREIGN AND DEFENSE MINISTERS IN CAIRO FEB 6 HAD RULED OUT OTHER DATES TO RESPOND TO THE "INVITATIONS" FROM

EGYPT AND SYRIA. FOR THE SOVIET'S PART, HE SAID, GROMYKO HAD TO BE AVAILABLE FOR PRIME MINISTER WILSON'S VISIT BEGINNING FEB 13, AND AFTER THAT GROMYKO WOULD BE OCCUPIED WITH OTHER VISITS AND MEETINGS. WHEN POLITICAL COUNSELOR SAID THAT WE WERE UNAWARE OF FURTHER FEBRUARY VISITS, PYRLIN INTERESTINGLY RESPONDED THAT THESE WERE NOT ASSOCIATED WITH GROMYKO'S RESPONSIBILITIES AS FOREIGN MINISTER, BUT RATHER WITH HIS MEMBERSHIP IN THE POLITBURO. (COMMENT: THIS IS THE FIRST INDICATION WE HAVE HAD OF ANY DEMANDING POLITBURO ACTIVITIES DURING THE LATTER PART OF FEBRUARY.) ON THE ARAB SIDE, THE DATES OF THE SYRIAN VISIT HAD BEEN WORKED OUT ON SHORT NOTICE, SINCE ASAD HAD BEEN UNAVAILABLE BECAUSE OF HIS BROTHER'S FUNERAL, PYRLIN SAID THAT GROMYKO WOULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY M.D. SYTENKO, HEAD OF MIDDLE EAST DEPARTMENT, MFA, ON HIS VISITS TO THE UAR AND SYRIA AND THAT HE, AS SYTENKO'S FIRST DEPUTY, WOULD BE IN CHARGE OF THE DEPARTMENT IN SYTENKO'S ABSENCE.

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LIMDIS

4. ON THE SUBSTANTIVE SIDE, PYRLIN SAID GROMYKO'S TALKS WITH EGYPTIANS LEADERS WERE MEANT TO CONTINUE THE DIALOGUE WHICH HAD TAKEN PLACE DURING THE VISIT OF FAHMY AND GAMASY TO MOSCOW IN DECEMBER. THE VISIT WAS NOT, HOWEVER, A SUBSTITUTE FOR THE BREZHNEV SUMMIT. THE TALKS, PYRLIN SAID, WOULD BE SOMETHING OF A TOUR D'HORIZON WITH THE EGYPTIANS. BILATERAL RELATIONS, THE MIDDLE EAST SITUATION, AND THE GENEVA CONFERENCE WOULD BE THE MAIN ITEMS DISCUSSED. THE USSR HAD MANY PROBLEMS WITH EGYPT, PYRLIN SAID. SADAT'S RECENT INTERVIEW WITH LE MONDE HAD RAISED DIFFICULT MATTERS AND DID NOT HELP THE AMELIORATE SOVIET-UAR RELATIONS. GROMYKO WOULD NOT BE PRIMARILY FOCUSING ON THE INTERVIEW, PYRLIN
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CLAIMED, BUT IT WOULD BE MENTIONED IN THE COURSE OF AN OVERALL REVIEW OF EGYPTIAN-SOVIET PROBLEMS. ON THE MORE POSITIVE SIDE, PYRLIN SAID HE EXPECTED GROMYKO TO SIGN THREE AGREEMENTS IN CAIRO: A TWO-YEAR SCIENTIFIC-TECHNICAL AGREEMENT, A CONSULAR CONVENTION, AND AN AGREEMENT ON COOPERATION IN ECONOMIC PLANNING BETWEEN THE EGYPTIAN MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC PLANNING AND GOSPLAN. PYRLIN SAID RESCHEDULING OF THE EGYPTIAN DEBT WOULD NOT BE DISCUSSED BECAUSE THIS ISSUE WAS NOT IN THE PORTFOLIO OF THE MFA. HOWEVER, IT WAS ON THE AGENDA FOR TRADE AND ECONOMIC TALKS BETWEEN APPROPRIATE EGYPTIAN AND SOVIET MINISTERS IN MOSCOW NEXT MONTH.

5. PYRLIN HAD LITTLE TO OFFER REGARDING GROMYKO'S DISCUSSIONS IN DAMASCUS. ACCORDING TO HIM, THERE ARE NO IMPORTANT OUTSTANDING ISSUES IN SOVIET-SYRIAN RELATIONS. GROMYKO'S MISSION THERE, HE SAID, ONLY INVOLVED GENERAL TALKS WITH THE SYRIANS ABOUT BILATERAL AFFAIRS AND THE MIDDLE EAST SITUATION. GROMYKO WOULD, HOWEVER, SIGN AN AGREEMENT ON HEALTH COOPERATION DURING THIS VISIT.

6. PYRLIN ATTRIBUTED THE DELAY IN THE OPENING OF THE PLO'S MOSCOW OFFICE PRIMARILY TO THE PLO'S INABILITY TO COME UP WITH A SUITABLE OFFICIAL TO HEAD THE OFFICE. ARAFAT, HE SAID, HAD ASSURED THE SOVIETS THAT THE PLO REPRESENTATIVE WOULD BE A "GOOD MAN." IN FACT, THE PLO'S CURRENT REPRESENTATIVE IN BAGHDAD HAD BEEN MENTIONED EARLY IN JANUARY, BUT SO FAR NO ONE HAD BEEN

OFFICIALLY SELECTED TO HEAD THE REPRESENTATION. PYRLIN INDICATED THAT SOVIET PROBLEMS IN SELECTING AN OFFICE FOR THE PLO MIGHT ALSO BE INVOLVED IN THE DELAY. IT WAS THE SOVIET'S RESPONSIBILITY TO FIND AN ACCEPTABLE SITE, HE SAID, BUT UPDK-- CHARACTERIZED AS THE "UPDK MAFIA" -- HAD NOT YET COME UP WITH SUITABLE SUGGESTIONS. THE STATUS OF THE OFFICE WHEN IT OPENS, PYRLIN CLAIMED, WILL BE THE SAME AS THAT PREVIOUSLY ACCORDED SOUTH VIET NAM'S PRG BEFORE ITS RECOGNITION AS A GOVERNMENT. IT WILL BE ACCREDITED TO THE AFRO-ASIAN SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE AND WILL HAVE SOME DIPLOMATIC PRIVILEGES (E.G. DIPLOMATIC AUTO TAGS, RIGHT TO FLY A FLAG, ETC.) BUT NOT ALL THE PRIVILEGES
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AND IMMUNITIES OF A DIPLOMATIC MISSION. THIS ARRANGEMENT, PYRLIN INDICATED, HAD BEEN NEGOTIATED WITH THE PLO ON THE BASIS OF THE PRG PRECEDENT, AND WAS ACCEPTABLE TO THE PALESTINIANS. ASKED ABOUT SOVIET VIEWS ON GEORGE HABASH' PFLP, PYRLIN SAID THAT THE SOVIETS FELT THAT EVENTUALLY HABASH WOULD REJOIN THE PLO. IN THIS REGARD, HE REFERRED TO A RECENT FOUR-HOUR DISCUSSION IN BEIRUT BETWEEN HADASH AND IGOR BELYAYEV, WELL-KNOWN SOVIET AUTHORITY ON PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS. THE SOVIET IMPRESSION FROM THIS CONVERSATION, PYRLIAN SAID, IS THAT DESPITE THEIR CURRENT STRAINED RELATIONS, HABASH WILL ULTIMATELY RESOLVE HIS QUARREL WITH THE PLO LEADERS.

7. COMMENTING ON THE RECENT VISITS BY THE SHAH AND KING FAISAL TO ARAB CAPITALS, PYRLIN INDICATED THAT THE SOVIETS BELIEVE KING FAISAL IS DEFINITELY THE GREATER INFLUENCE IN THE ARAB WORLD. THE SHAH'S VISITS, PYRLIN THOUGH, RESULTED FROM IRAN'S DESIRE TO PLAY A BIG POWER ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST. IRAN HAD MOVED CLOSER TO THE ARABS RECENTLY AND WAS ENGAGED IN BUILDING UP ITS ARMED FORCES TO BECOME A MAJOR MILITARY FORCE IN THE REGION. NEVERTHELESS, PYRLIN SAID, IRAN'S INFLUENCE IS STILL NOT GREAT. KING FAISAL, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAS RELIGIOUS, NATIONAL, AND ECONOMIC INFLUENCE AND REMAINS AN IMPORTANT FORCE. HIS POLICIES, PYRLIN NOTED IN A REGRETFUL TONE, ARE AGAINST SOVIET INFLUENCE IN THE AREA. PYRLIN SAID THE SOVIETS BELIEVE THAT DURING HIS TALKS WITH ASAD AND SADAT THE KING HAD COUNSELLED HIS FELLOW ARAB LEADERS TO AVOID INVOLVEMENT WITH THE USSR. HIS CONCERN WITH THE HOLY PLACES, HOWEVER, COMPLICATES HIS RELATIONS WITH THE PALESTINIANS, AND SAUDI ARABIA HAS DIFFICULTY FINDING A PALESTINIAN ORGANIZATION WITH WHICH IT CAN COOPERATE.

8. WHEN POLITICAL COUNSELOR RECALLED THAT PYRLIN DURING PREVIOUS CONVERSATION HAD CHARACTERIZED HIMSELF AS A "MODIFIED OPTIMIST" ABOUT THE MIDDLE EAST, PYRLIN SAID THIS WAS STILL THE CASE. HE THOUGHT GENEVA REMAINED THE EVENTUAL KEY TO A MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT, AND HE HOPED THAT THE MEPC COULD BE RECONVENED FAIRLY CONFIDENTIAL

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SOON, PERHAPS IN MARCH OR IN APRIL. HE AFFIRMED THAT THE SOVIETS DO NOT BELIEVE THE RECONVENING OF GENEVA SHOULD RULE OUT OTHER POSSIBLE AVENUES TO NEGOTIATION OR AGREEMENT, BUT ARGUED THAT SUCH ALTERNATE APPROACHES COULD BE CARRIED ON IN PARALLEL WITH AND NOT IN LIEU OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE. HE THOUGHT THAT THE NEXT MEETING OF EGYPT, SYRIA, JORDAN AND PLO MIGHT BE IMPORTANT IN ADVANCING TOWARD GENEVA. HE SAID MOSCOW HAD REPORTS THAT THIS MEETING, ORIGINALLY SCHEDULED TO TAKE PLACE IN FEBRUARY IN DAMASCUS, MAY NOW BE HELD AT A HIGHER LEVEL IN RIYAD, PROBABLY IN MARCH.
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